



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

THE POWER OF MR. MOODY'S MINISTRY.

BY THE REV. LYMAN ABBOTT, D. D.

THE death of Mr. Moody naturally suggests the question, What was the secret of his extraordinary power? Without office in Church or State; without theological, collegiate or even the better Sunday-school education; without a church or society behind him to support him, or a constituency, except such as he himself created, to afford him moral support; without any of the recognized graces of oratory, and without any ambition to form a new ecclesiastical organization or a new school of theological thought, and perhaps without the ability to do so; nevertheless, Dwight L. Moody probably spoke to a greater number of auditors than any man of his time in either Europe or America, unless possibly John B. Gough may be an exception, and he spoke on spiritual themes to audiences which were less prepared therefor by any previous spiritual culture than those addressed on such themes by any preacher since Wesley and Whitfield. In this paper I do not propose to attempt any analysis of Mr. Moody's character, or any sketch of his extraordinary career, with the main facts of which it is safe to assume that all readers of the NORTH AMERICAN REVIEW are familiar, but simply to use that career to elucidate a truth to the affirmation of which he gave his life, and which needs constant reiteration in press, pulpit and platform.

The question is much discussed in the press, Are the churches losing their power? More fundamental is the question, What is the secret of such power as they possess? The question is much discussed in ministerial circles, Why do not more people go to church? More fundamental is the question, What is the secret of the attraction which draws to the churches, with such regularity, so many men and women, of different stations and of varying degrees of moral and intellectual culture? From the

point of view of a pure secularist, the phenomenon is an extraordinary if not an insoluble one. To the markets the people go to procure the food required to support physical life; to the dry goods stores for clothing necessary for comfort or contributing to luxury; to the theatres, wearied with their work, they go to forget their toil in an hour of amusement; to the art galleries and the concert rooms, attracted by esthetic desires; to the schools, that in their youth they may obtain the results of the experience of the past, and so may live more intelligently, avoiding the blunders of their fathers. But why do they go to church? What in their nature prompts them? Not for food, or protection from weather, or amusement, or instruction in the art of present-day living. What do they expect? What have they a right to expect? What must the churches give to them, if the congregations are not to go away disappointed? These questions Mr. Moody's character and career help at once to emphasize and to answer.

It is not enough to reply that a habit of church-going has been formed and is kept up from mere tradition. A habit does not exist in all classes of society, during a period of many centuries, in different localities and even in different countries, without some ultimate reason behind this habit which has induced it. It is not enough to say that the people are attracted by the oratory, the music or the art. The minister is rarely an orator; the music rarely equals that of the concert room; the art does not compare with that of the art galleries, and, though generally in better taste, is rarely as popular as that of the theatres. At best, oratory, music and art are but incidental and subsidiary attractions to the church. The answer can only be found in the declaration of Sabatier, that "man is incurably religious," in the affirmation of Jesus Christ that "man does not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God." The marketplace is not a more sure witness that man has a physical appetite, the concert room and the art gallery that he has esthetic appetites, than are the churches and the Sunday congregations that he has a spiritual hunger. That the churches often fail to satisfy this hunger, and even sometimes pretend to satisfy it by methods which injure instead of benefiting the attendant, no more militate against the witness which the existence of the churches bears to man's spiritual needs than does bad music or bad art indicate that man has no esthetic nature.

I shall not undertake here to analyze this spiritual hunger, or to describe all the elements which enter into it, or all the occasions which especially and notably excite it. It must suffice for my present purpose to indicate two elements, neither of which is ever wholly wanting from any man who is not himself wholly lacking in some of the elements essential to a normal manhood: the first relates to his past, the second to his future.

Every healthful man sometimes—some men at all times—looks back regretfully upon his past. He is conscious of blunders in judgment, conscious of aberrations of will, conscious of deliberate acts of wrong-doing which have brought injury upon himself and upon others. He wishes that he could live again his life, or some particular crisis in his life. His experience answers more or less consciously to the expression in the General Confession in the Book of Common Prayer: "We have done the things which we ought not to have done, and we have left undone the things which we ought to have done," even if his self-dissatisfaction does not lead him to add, "And there is no health in us." Sometimes this is a keen sense of shame for some specific deed done or duty neglected; sometimes it is a vague feeling of self-condemnation, without clearly defined specific cause. Sometimes it is a passing shadow, evanescent and uninfluential; sometimes it is a morbid self-condemnation, depressing the spirits and tending toward despair. But he who has never felt this sense of remorse in some one of its various forms is singularly lacking, either in his memory, his ideals, or his power of sitting in judgment upon his own conduct and character. It is doubtful whether any desire which the human soul ever possessed is keener or more overmastering than the desire which sometimes possesses it, in certain phases of experience, to be rid of its ineradicable past and to be permitted to begin life anew, unclogged and unburdened.

The other spiritual hunger of the soul relates to the future. The soul is conscious of undeveloped possibilities in itself; it is spurred on to it knows not what future, by unsatisfied aspirations. It longs to do and to be more, and rather to be than to do. It suffers what I may call "growing pains." It has in the sphere of moral experience aspirations which may be compared to those which have summoned the greatest musicians and the greatest artists to their careers. This sense of unsatisfied aspiration differs from the sense of remorse in that it relates to the future, not to

the past; the one is a consciousness of wrong committed or duty left undone, the other of life incomplete. The cry of the soul in the one experience is that of Paul, "Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" The cry of the other is like that of Tennyson:

" Oh for a man to arise in me
That the man that I am, may cease to be."

The one is a craving for peace, the other for achievement. The one belongs to a nature which dwells in the past, the other to a nature which lives in the future. Not only are different temperaments differently affected, the one being more conscious of regret, the other of unsatisfied aspiration; but the same person sometimes experiences the one, sometimes the other. One age of the world is more prone to the former, another age to the latter. In our time, there is comparatively little experience of regret for the past. There is, to use the phrase current in theological circles, very little "conviction of sin." The age has its face set toward the future. Its ideals lie before it, not behind. It is eager, expectant, hopeful, aspiring. It takes no time to look back, not even time enough to learn the lessons which the past can teach. But it is full of eager expectations for a nobler civilization, greater wealth, more harmonious relations between employer and employed, juster government, better social and industrial conditions, a nearer approximation to brotherhood. In the Middle Ages, humanity was burdened by the consciousness of past wrong-doing, and it sought relief from its burden by seclusion from the world in monastic retreats. In the present age, humanity is feverish with unsatisfied aspirations, and is driven by its fever into the world, there to engage in ceaseless and excessive activities. Like a mettlesome steed cruelly rowelled with spurs, yet held in by a curb bit, is the present age, spurred on by aspiration to even greater achievements, yet held back by prudential self-interest from the great endeavor and the greater self-sacrifices without which the noblest achievements are always impossible.

It is because the Christian religion professes to be able to satisfy these two passionate desires of the human soul—the desire for peace and the desire for achievement—that it possesses the attraction which the failures and the folly of its adherents may diminish, but cannot destroy.

Christianity is not a system of ethics—though it has revolutionized ethics; nor a method of worship—though it has furnished

a new inspiration to worship and given it a new character; nor a philosophy—though a great many divergent philosophies have been attempted to account for it. It is a life founded on a historic fact; take that fact away and it is difficult to see how the life could survive. The belief of the universal Christian Church in that fact is expressed with incomparable simplicity in the words of one of the more ancient Christian creeds: "I believe in one Lord Jesus Christ. . . . Who for us men and our salvation came down from heaven." What is the relation of this Lord Jesus Christ to the Eternal Father from whom He came, and how He accomplishes our salvation are questions to which Christian philosophers give different answers. But all Christian believers accept the historic fact that there is one Lord Jesus Christ, and that He came down from Heaven for us men and our salvation. In its possession of this faith and its interest in this fact lies the secret of the power of the Christian Church. Rob it of this faith, take from it this fact, and its peculiar power would be gone; it would only be a teacher of ethics, or a school of philosophy, or a conductor of religious mysteries in an unintelligible worship of an unknown God. For in its possession of this fact lies its power to take from men the two burdens which so sorely oppress them—that of a remorse for a wrongful past, that of unsatisfied aspiration in the present and for the future.

Empowered by this fact, the Church declares to men burdened that their sins are forgiven them. This is not a philosophical statement founded on a general faith that God is good and therefore will forgive sins; still less is it the enunciation of a general belief that He is merciful and therefore will not be very exacting of His children, but will let them off from deserved punishment if they appeal to Him with adequate signs of repentance, in penances or otherwise. It is the statement of the historic fact that God forgave men their sins before they repented; that He bears no ill will and sometimes no wrath against them; that He only desires for them that they shall be good men and true; and that, to accomplish this, His good-will toward them, Jesus Christ has come for His Father and our Father into the world. Empowered by this fact, the Church acts as the official and authoritative promulgator of a divine forgiveness, an authoritative and historically re-enforced interpreter of the divine disposition; empowered by this fact, the Christian teacher repeats of

himself what Jesus Christ said of Himself: "The Son of Man hath power on earth to remit sins." He reiterates Christ's message and with the same authority: "Go in peace and sin no more." He re-declares, not as a theory, but as an historically established fact: "Almighty God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . hath given power and commandment to His ministers, to declare and pronounce to His people, being penitent, the absolution and remission of their sins. He pardoneth and absolveth all those who truly repent and unfeignedly believe His holy Gospel."

While the Church thus with authority unloosens the burden of the past from those on whom a remorseful memory has bound that past, it also inspires with a hope for the future which turns the anxious and sometimes despairing aspirations into eager and gladly expectant ones. For it tells the story of a Man Who in Himself fulfilled the spiritual desires which are in all noble men, and then, departing, left as His legacy the command, which is also a promise: "Follow me." It answers the question, What is human nature? by pointing to the character of Jesus of Nazareth, with the assurance, What He was every man can become. It answers the question, Is life worth living? by pointing to that life and declaring that, as He laid down His life for us, so can we lay down our lives for one another. It presents to humanity not an ideal merely, but a realized ideal, and in this realization of the highest ideal of character gives assurance that our aspirations are not doomed to disappointment, unless we ourselves so doom them. That they are intended by our Father to be realized and that we can realize them, is historically attested by the life of Him Who was the Son of Man, and Who experiencing our battles has pointed out to us the possibility of and the way to victory.

This is the secret of the power of the Church: not the excellence of its ethical instruction, not the wisdom of its religious philosophy, not the esthetic beauty of its buildings or its services, and certainly not the oratory of its preachers: but this, that it is charged with a double message to men burdened by a sense of wrong-doing in the past, tormented by unfulfilled aspirations for the future; a message to the first, "Thy sins are forgiven thee;" a message to the second, "You can do all things through Him that strengtheneth you." Poorly as the Church understands its mission, poorly as it delivers its message, it nevertheless has this as

its mission, this as its message. And when it fulfills the one and delivers the other with the power that comes from the conscious possession of divine authority, men gather to its services to receive its gift. This is not the only message of Christianity; it teaches a purer ethics, it proffers a more sacred consolation, it incites to a more joyous and inspiring worship than any other religion; but no other religion has attempted to proclaim with authority pardon for the past or to give as from God Himself power for the future.

Of the principles which I am here trying to interpret, two illustrations are afforded in the very recent life of the Church—illustrations which are all the more significant because they come from quarters so dissimilar theologically and ecclesiastically that to many persons they seem to have nothing in common. The first illustration is afforded by the High Church movement in England—the second by the life and work of Dwight L. Moody.

It can hardly be necessary to say that I have no ecclesiastical or theological sympathy with the High Church movement. I do not believe that Jesus Christ organized a Church, or appointed bishops, or gave directly or by remote implication any special authority to the bishops thereafter to be appointed in the Church, or conferred special grace, or intended that special grace should be conferred, by the sacraments of Baptism and the Lord's Supper, or made either of them means of conveying supernatural grace, except in so far as they became the expressions of a mood or spirit of mind receptive of grace. I do not believe in the perpetuity of a priesthood, or an altar, or the kind of sacrificial system which a priesthood and an altar seem to typify. And yet it is impossible for any student of current events to doubt that the High Church party in the Anglican Church is really exerting a notable spiritual influence in England; that it is attracting in many cases large congregations to before sparsely attended churches; that it is felt as a power in many hearts and homes. To think that this is because Protestant England is going back to its old-time allegiance to the Pope of Rome, or because a generation which has departed in its social standards from the severer simplicity of Puritan England wants elaborate ritualism in its churches, or because it is easier to conduct an orderly ritual than to preach a tolerable sermon, and easier to go through the first without attention than to give attention to the second, is to misread the signs of the times, and, in judging a movement, to esti-

mate it by the mere incidents which happen to accompany it and not by the essential spirit which characterizes it. The essential spirit which characterizes the High Church party is its sacerdotal spirit; its exaltation of the priesthood and the altar; its conversion of the memorial supper into a bloodless sacrifice of the mass; and its use of priesthood, altar, and mass to emphasize the right of the priest to declare *authoritatively* the absolution and remission of sins. It is because the High Church priesthood assume power on earth to forgive sins, and so to relieve men and women of the first of the two burdens of which I have spoken, that it has its power over the hearts of its adherents. It is for this reason, also, that its power is mainly seen among women. Women's morbid consciences make them susceptible to painful and sometimes needless regrets, and a Church which offers to remove this burden of the past appeals to them more than it does to men, who are more inclined to let the dead bury their dead and ask for a religion which will help them to a better future. High Church theology has no special efficacy in equipping the soul for the future, and it has therefore no special attraction for virile men. But so long as men and women feel the burden of the irreparable past, so long they will come to that Church, and that alone, which declares with authority that the past is forgiven; and they will not always be critical in inquiring whether all the grounds on which that authority is claimed can stand historical investigation.

At the other extreme, ecclesiastically, are the evangelists of our time, chief among them all, and type of them all, Dwight L. Moody. If I speak of him peculiarly, it is because he affords so striking an illustration of the principle which I wish to elucidate. Mr. Moody belonged to a denomination which discards all notion of the priesthood, whose ministry are only laymen performing a special function in a church without orders. In this church he never had such ordination as is generally required of those who desire to exercise ministerial functions. His services were attended neither by Baptism nor by the Lord's Supper. He believed that the latter was a memorial service, not a bloodless sacrifice; that any Christian, whether lay or clerical, was equally a priest; to him the church was a meeting-house and the altar a communion table or table of meeting; and most of his services were held in unconsecrated halls. But never did a High Church priest of the Anglican Church believe more profoundly that to him had been given

authority to promise the absolution and remission of sins, than did Mr. Moody believe that he possessed such authority. Rarely, if ever, did priest, Anglican or Catholic, hear more vital confessions or pronounce absolution with greater assurance. The High Churchman thinks that he derives such power through a long ecclesiastical line; Mr. Moody believed that he derived it through the declarations of the Bible; but both in the last analysis obtained it by their faith in "one Lord Jesus Christ, . . . Who for usmen and for our salvation came down from Heaven," The one no less than the other spoke, or claimed to speak, by authority; both derived their authority from the same great historic fact; and the attractive power which drew unnumbered thousands to the preaching of Mr. Moody, was in its essence the same as that which draws unnumbered thousands to the Altar and the Eucharist.

For myself I believe neither in the authority of the ecclesiastical organization with the Churchman, nor in the infallibility of the Book with Mr. Moody. The authority to pronounce absolution and remission for the sins that are past and to proffer this gift of life to fulfill the aspirations of the soul for the future, I take to be spiritual, not ecclesiastical nor traditional, and to belong equally to every one who has received such absolution and remission, and such gift of spiritual life. But I am sure that if we of the so-called liberal faith hope to retain in these more liberal days the attractive power of the Church, we can do it only by holding fast to the great historic facts of the birth, life, passion and death of Jesus Christ essentially as they are narrated in the Four Gospels, and to the great spiritual fact that in the God whom He has declared to us, there is abundant forgiveness for all the past, and abundant life for all the future; and we must declare this, not as a theological opinion, to be defended by philosophical arguments as a rational hypothesis, but as an assured fact, historically certified by the life and death of Jesus Christ and confirmed out of the mouth of many witnesses by the experience of Christ's disciples and followers in all Churches and in every age. If we fail to do this, men will desert our ministry for Romanism, Anglicanism and Evangelism, or, in despair of spiritual life in any quarter, will desert all that ministers to the higher life, and live a wholly material life, alternating between restless, unsatisfied desire and stolid self-content. And the fault and the folly will be ours more even than theirs.

LYMAN ABBOTT.